

## **Worship, Praise, and Vaccination: The Faith Community's Role in Flu Prevention**

By **Reverend XYZ**

Centers of worship—for all faiths—provide places of compassion and offer positive messages of hope and healing, both to individuals within their doors and to those in the surrounding community. I am proud to say this is true at **NAME ORGANIZATION**, where we have reinforced that physical health is an important part of spiritual health through efforts such as **NAME 1-2 INITIATIVES**.

I am also glad to know that we are not alone. In neighborhoods all over the nation, centers of worship are serving their communities by taking seriously the charge to reach out to people with information and services that promote healing and healthy decisions.

This week, December 5–11 2010, is National Influenza Vaccination Week, and I am joining many centers of worship in preparing our congregations and constituents for the flu season. There are so many serious health issues confronting our communities—some of which might not be easily solved-- but flu is one serious health issue for which we can offer an empowering and effective chance at prevention. Faith-based and community organizations can—and should—play an integral part in preventing flu by encouraging annual flu vaccination.

Last year's 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic put flu on the nation's agenda. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 57 million cases of the virus occurred in the United States, including 257,000 H1N1-related hospitalizations, and about 11,690 deaths.

We should ensure that our congregations and our communities know that flu is a serious disease. Flu can be unpredictable, and every season causes serious disease, including missed work, school, or even hospitalizations and deaths. Every year it sickens 5 to 20 percent of Americans and sends about 200,000 people to the hospital. Flu is deadly for thousands each year—including children.

Flu can spread quickly in churches, synagogues, and mosques, where many people congregate, shake hands, and share meals. This flu season, CDC is encouraging everyone 6 months of age and older to get vaccinated against influenza.

This National Influenza Vaccination Week provides those of us in communities of faith with an opportunity to remind each other about the dangers of flu and to encourage vaccination before flu season hits its peak, which typically occurs in January or February. We can also empower our communities with the knowledge that the flu vaccine is safe and effective.

If you're a leader in a faith community, you can share this message with your members and with the communities you serve. It's especially important to reach people who are at high risk for flu complications, including families with very young children, adults 65 and older, pregnant

women, and people with chronic health conditions like asthma or diabetes. It's also important to stress that even healthy people can get very sick from flu, and everyone should get a flu vaccine.

Faith communities can also support local vaccination efforts. I encourage the faith community to include reminders about vaccination in bulletins, newsletters, and other regular communications. You can download free flu resources and materials at [www.cdc.gov/flu/freeresources](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/freeresources). Let members know about nearby locations to get the flu vaccine, or direct them to the Flu Vaccine Finder at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov). Consider hosting a flu vaccine event in your fellowship hall or family life center, or promoting and participating in vaccine events around your community.

With a focus on loving and serving others, faith organizations are trusted institutions in their communities. We have an opportunity—and, indeed, a responsibility—to help convey the importance of flu vaccination as the single best way to protect against flu.

*Reverend XYZ is Some Position in Some Faith-based Organization.*

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